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ABSTRACT

One of the largest problems facing rural school counselors is that of confronting the low career expectations that many rural students have by the time they reach high school. The relationship among the fear of success (FOS), self-concept, and career decision making of adolescents was examined in this study. Special attention was given to whether or not the sex difference for FOS as reported for urban youth is also true for rural youth. Students (N=276) from three middle schools and three high schools in eastern Kentucky participated in this study. Each participant completed three self-report measures. Statistical analysis of the results reveals that the rural youth demonstrated a higher FOS than reported by urban youth in previous studies. Contrary to other studies, male participants reported a higher FOS than did female students. FOS was found to be related to both career certainty and career indecision: lower FOS was related to higher career certainty whereas higher FOS was related to higher career indecision. FOS was also found to be related to self-esteem. As FOS increases, self-esteem drops, career indecision rises, and career certainty decreases. Although a relationship was found among these variables, any causal relationships or interaction effects could not be addressed. (RJM)

The Relationship Between Fear of Success, Self-Concept, and Career Decision Making

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between fear of success, self-concept, and career decision making of adolescents. Two-hundred and seventy-six students from three middle and three senior high schools in eastern Kentucky participated in this study. Each participant completed the Fear of Success Scale (FOSS), Career Decision Scale (CDS), and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI). Career Decision Scale scores were divided into two measures; a Certainty scale score (CDS1) and an Indecision scale score (CDS2). Pearson correlation coefficients were obtained comparing fear of success, self-concept, and career decision making. FOSS was positively related to CDS2, r=.1680, p<.01; i.e., as FOSS increased so did one's indecision about a career. Also, FOSS, was negatively related to SEI, r=-.1430, $p < .05$; i.e., as FOSS increased one's self-concept decreased. CDS1 was positively related to SEI, r = .1544, $p < .01$; i.e., as certainty regarding one's career increased so did one's self-concept. Lastly, CDS2 was negatively related to SEI, r = -.2300, $p < .01$; i.e., as indecision regarding careers increased, self-concept decreased. A Spearman rho analysis, conducted on grade with these variables, found that grade was negatively related to CDS1, r = -.2139, $p < .001$; i.e., the higher the grade, the lower the indecision regarding one's career. Implications for practice and research will be discussed.

The Relationship between Fear of Success, Self-Concept, and Career Decision Making

One of the largest problems facing rural school counselors is that of confronting the low career expectations that many rural students have by the time they reach high school. The relationship between career development and self-concept has been shown to be intimately connected (Super, 1957). What about "fear of success"? Perhaps many rural youth have low career aspirations because they do not have confidence in their competence.

Fear of Success

For many years researchers have been interested in educational and career barriers as related to fear of success (FOS). Horner's (1968) work with undergraduate college students, was among the first to posit that the motive of avoiding success was a stable disposition among women. Horner found that while 65.5% of the females expressed FOS, only 9.1% of males expressed FOS themes. In a later study Horner (1972) noted that 47% of males expressed FOS, while 88.2% of females indicated FOS showing the predicted sex difference. Although the difference between males and females was still significant, the difference was not as great as indicated in Horner's earlier (1968) research. Replications of Horner's procedures, which have been conducted in urban settings, have not provided support for the contention that males and females differ regarding FOS (Tresemer, 1974).

Baruch (1973) found FOS not related to career

aspirations or IQ in her samples. Also, Zuckerman and Wheeler (1975) suggest that fear of success is not related in any consistent way to direct and indirect measures of achievement motivation.

In a related study of adolescents' fear of social consequences of academic success as a function of age and sex, Ishiyama and Chabassol (1985) found that, in an urban high school, FOS was higher among girls than among boys and higher among early adolescents than mid-adolescents. Regarding the general trend of declining FOS with age among both boys and girls, the researchers cite three plausible developmental and cultural factors: (1) emotional and social independence; (2) changes in academic and vocational concerns and future goals; and (3) changes in peer norms and cultural norms (Ishiyama & Chabassol, 1985, p. 44).

Ishiyama and Chabasol (1985) also reported that older adolescents were more self-confident and self-directed with a lessened emphasis on approval seeking and governing by peers. They speculated that adolescent girls in the 1980s may be less inhibited culturally about their aspirations for developing their own occupational and academic identities.

Self Concept

Super's (1957) theory posits that students with high self-esteem have clearer and more definitive conceptions of themselves relative to career decision making than do low self-esteem students. In this regard, Munson (1992) investigated the self-

esteem, vocational identity and career salience of high school students in the context of Super's (1957) theory of life span career development. Munson (1992) found that students with high self-esteem scored higher on vocational identity. Also, students with high self-esteem could be differentiated from those with low self-esteem in the areas of greater participation in school and home and family roles.

Perhaps one of the reasons for students with high self-esteem to score higher in the areas of participation, commitment and values expectations for the roles of student and homemaker, may be related to the family, home, and school environments being some of the most powerful influences on the development of children's and adolescents' conceptions of the self. For example, Fuhrmann (1986) found that positive self-concepts are developed in environments that promote acceptance and opportunities for realistic self appraisals.

In fact, Kidd (1984) suggests that self-concepts and occupational preferences do have a role in career development. She indicated that Super's self-concept theory is more applicable to more able students who possess high self-esteem. Kidd reported that the young people's self-concepts may have lacked insight, and their job knowledge may have been inadequate due to their limited experience in the world of work.

Socioeconomic status (SES) has also had an impact on self-concept. Elder (1974) theorized that in economically deprived families children internalized the family's losses resulting in

self-consciousness, emotional sensitivity, and lowered self esteem. Interestingly, Elder (1974) did examine the indirect effect of unemployment status on self-concept using a simple path model and found that deprivation had a negative impact on the parent-adolescent relationship, which in turn, contributed to a decline in the adolescents' self-esteem. However, this hypothesis was not supported in Ortez and Farrell's (1993) study which examined the effects of significant economic loss and changes in family structure on adolescents' self-concept and found no direct effect of unemployment status on self-concept.

Career Choices

The family system has been influential in career decision making. For example, Penick and Jepsen (1992) reported that functions maintaining the family system may contribute more to career development experiences of the adolescent than relationship factors. Rojewski (1994) included other residual factors which may inhibit rural youth in their career aspirations, such as geographic location, fewer employment opportunities, lack of economic vitality and lower educational and vocational achievement. Rubisch (1995) states that it is hard to get students motivated when their parents do not emphasize the importance of education. Low academic achievement and low career aspirations are also attributed to the amount of hours students work at part-time jobs.

Research Concerns

Horner's (1968, 1972) postulations on the motive to avoid

success in women have elicited some controversy among researchers. The most frequent criticism relates to the unconventional development of her projective assessment and the questionable reliability of the measurement technique. In addition, the establishment of FOS as an independent motivational component is questionable (Ward, 1978). Condry and Dyer (1976) propose consideration of fear of success as a situational variable. Interestingly, empirical trends (e.g., Schnitzer, 1977; Peplau, 1976) tend to support Horner's conceptualization of FOS as a debilitating anxiety in achievement oriented situations.

Condry and Dyer (1976) emphasize that a "motive possessed by women cannot be used to explain away the inequities of society", (p. 76). Instead, we are called upon to look at the realistic barriers to female achievement in terms of the social feedback received as a consequence of playing various social roles.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between fear of success, self-concept, and vocational choices, especially in adolescent females and males in a rural area. It is unclear from an analysis of the literature whether rural youth have the same patterns of fear of success which have been identified in research on urban youth. It is speculated that rural youth may have low career expectations because they do not have confidence in their competence, evidenced by a high fear of success and a poor self-concept. There is an indication in the literature that males and females differ on fear of success, although this has not been

demonstrated in replication studies. The strength of the present study is that it looks at the three measurements of fear of success, self-concept, and career decision-making in a previously understudied rural population.

Method

Sample

Two-hundred and seventy-six students from three middle and three high schools participated in the study; 134 young men and 135 young women; 7 did not indicate their gender. The population surveyed in rural eastern Kentucky is predominantly white. One-hundred and six students were 7th graders, 88 were 9th graders, and 70 were 12th graders. A majority of students are identified as low socioeconomic status (SES).

Instruments

Self Esteem. The Self Esteem Inventory (SEI) (Coopersmith, 1987) was administered to the students to measure the evaluations that students would make about their own self-worth. Coopersmith states, "The term 'self-esteem' refers to the evaluation a person makes and customarily maintains with regard to him or herself", (p.6). The School Short Form was used in this study, with a maximum possible Total Self Score of 100. The SEI has a reported test-retest reliability of .88 (interval 5 weeks) and .70 (3-year interval) (Coopersmith, 1967). The manual, Self-Esteem Inventories (Coopersmith, 1987), reports studies of the SEI's construct validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity, factor analyses, and multitrait-multimethod validity. Fullerton

(1972) reported a validity coefficient between the SEI and behavioral observations of self-esteem recorded in the Behavior Rating Form (BRF) of $r=.44$, $p < .005$. Kokenes (1974, 1978) conducted a construct validity study of the SEI that included 7,600 students and concluded that the SEI did indeed yield "scores of self-esteem."

Fear of Success. Students also completed the Fear of Success Scale (FOSS) (Zuckerman & Allison, 1976). Fear of success refers to a motive to avoid success (Horner, 1972). The FOSS contains 27 items. For 16 of the items agreement was keyed as high fear of success. The remainder of the items (11) were keyed for low fear of success (Zuckerman & Allison, 1976). Each item was adapted to a Likert format with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 7 indicating "strongly agree". Scores on the FOSS range from 27 to 189 with high scores indicating high fear of success. Coefficient alpha was .69 for males and .73 for females (Zuckerman & Allison, 1976).

Career Decisions. Career decision making was determined by the Career Decision Scale (CDS) (Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yamico, & Koschier, 1976). The CDS contains 19 items, 18 of which are in a Likert format with 4 indicating "like me" and 1 indicating "not like me". For the purposes of the present study, item 19, an open-ended item, was omitted. The items relate to statements people make about their educational and occupational plans. Items 1 and 2 comprise the Certainty Scale, which provides a measure of the degree of certainty that the student feels regarding their

decision about a major and a career. Item 3 through 18 comprise the Indecision Scale, which is a measure of career indecision (Osipow, 1987). Certainty Scale (CS) scores at the 15th percentile or less suggest that the student is uncertain about a career. Indecision Scale (IS) scores at or above the 85th percentile indicates indecision about a career. The CDS is appropriate for high school students, and the reading level is "modest" (Westbrook, Cutts, Madison & Arcia, 1980). The CDS takes about 15 minutes to complete. Test-retest correlations of .82 to .90 have been reported for the Indecision Scale (Osipow, Carney, & Barak, 1976). Osipow (1987) reported that studies have generally supported the validity of the CDS.

Procedure

Participants were solicited after brief presentations to the designated grade levels were made by five graduate counseling practicum students, two school counselors, and 1 school psychologist. Students who agreed to participate were provided with consent forms to be completed by them or their parents. Following receipt of consent forms, the SEI, FOSS, and CDS were administered to the students during one class period.

Results

Means and standard deviations for fear of success and career decision making are indicated in Tables 1 and 2. Career Decision Scale scores were divided into two measures; a Certainty Scale (CDSI) score and an Indecision Scale (CDS2) score.

According to Coopersmith (1987) the means of the SEI have

ranged from 70 to 80 with a standard deviation (sd) range from 11 to 13. With a mean of 65.01 and sd of 19.63 it appears that the present sample is within the low medium to medium level of self-esteem, as compared to the normative sample.

With regards to fear of success, Zuckerman and Allison (1976) reported that in samples of undergraduate students, the means and sd's for FOSS scores ranged from 107.2 to 111.3 and 13.5 to 14.7 respectively for females, and means from 101.4 to 106.7 with similar sd's respectively for males. In the present study, the mean of 115.62 and sd of 17.96 for males is a little higher than the normative sample. With the mean of 110.75 and sd of 18.39, the same is true for the females in this study. (See Table 1.)

Even though there are no normative data for 7th graders on the CDS, means and sd's are available for 9th and 12th graders. The mean and sd for the Certainty Scale is 5.21 and 1.53, respectively for 9th graders, and 5.92 and 1.59, respectively for 12th graders. The means and sd's on the Indecision Scale are 32.11 and 8.81, respectively for 9th graders, and 27.89 and 8.41, respectively for 12 graders (Osipow, et al., 1976). Accordingly, the means of 5.81 and sd of 1.54 of the present 9th grade sample appears to be close to the normative sample on the Certainty Scale. The mean of 5.84 and sd of 1.79 is also similar to the 12th grade normative sample on the Indecision Scale. However, the mean of 32.63 and sd of 9.68 for the 12th graders is higher that the normative sample. (See Table 2.)

According to Osipow et al., (1976), CDSI scores which are at the 15th percentile or lower suggest that the student is uncertain about a major or career choice. A score of 6 would place 9th grade boys at the 80th percentile and 12th grade boys at the 68th percentile. For girls, a score of 6 would place 9th graders at the 79th percentile and 12th graders at the 68th percentile. Thus, it appears that the present sample has some idea about a career or major.

CDS2 scores which are at the 85th percentile or higher indicate that the student is indecisive about a major or career choice. An Indecision Scale score of 36 would place 9th and 12th grade boys at the 69th and 80th percentiles, respectively. This same score would place 9th and 12th grade girls at the 66th and 82nd percentiles, respectively. Thus, it appears that the present sample is as decisive about a career as the 9th grade normative sample.

Pearson correlation coefficients were obtained comparing fear of success, self-esteem, and career decision making. It was found that FOSS was positively related to CDS2, $r=.1680$, $p < .01$; that is, as FOSS increased so did one's indecision about a career. Also, FOSS was negatively related to SEI, $r= -.1430$, $p < .05$; that is, as FOSS increased one's self-esteem decreased. Further, CDSI was positively related to SEI, $r=.1544$, $p < .01$; that is, as certainty regarding one's career increased so did one's self-esteem. Lastly, CDS2 was negatively related to SEI, $r=-.2300$, $p < .01$; that is, as indecision regarding careers

increased, self-esteem decreased. See Table 3.

A Spearman rho analysis was also conducted on grade with these variables. It was found that grade was negatively related to CDS2, $r=-.2139$, $p < .001$; that is, the higher the grade, the lower the indecision regarding one's career.

Discussion

The present study was an attempt to determine whether the sex difference for fear of success reported for urban youth is also true for rural youth, and to explore the relationship between FOS, self-concept, and career decision making.

This sample of rural youth demonstrated a higher fear of success than previous studies on urban youth. Also of note is that, contrary to previous studies which found females had a higher FOS (Horner, 1968; Horner, 1972; Ishiyama & Chabassol, 1985) or found no sex differences (Tresemer, 1974), the present study found males to have a higher FOS than females.

Contrary to Baruch (1973) and Zuckerman and Wheeler (1975), the present study found FOS to be related to both career certainty and career indecision. Lower FOS was related to higher career certainty while higher FOS was related to higher career indecision. Fear of success was also found to be related to self-esteem with higher FOS corresponding to lower self-esteem.

Students in the present study scored below the average of the normative group on self-esteem and demonstrated greater variability in their scores. From this, it would be predicted that the students would also score generally lower on the Career

Certainty Scale and higher on the Career Indecision Scale (Super, 1957; Munson, 1992; Fuhrmann, 1986; Kidd, 1984). In fact, students in this study did demonstrate a significant relationship between their self-esteem and career decision making. As certainty of career decision increased, self-esteem increased. As career indecision increased, self-esteem decreased.

As predicted, the older a student was, the lower their indecision regarding career choices. This supports Ishiyama and Chabasol's (1985) finding that older adolescents are more self-confident and self-directed in developing occupational identities.

The present results indicate that rural Appalachian youth, particularly males, have a higher fear of success which is related to both self-esteem and career decision making. As FOS increases, self-esteem drops, career indecision rises and career certainty decreases. The present study indicates a relationship between the variables, but can not address causal relationships or interaction effects. It remains unclear and speculative whether, for instance, implementing a program to increase self-esteem would cause a decrease in FOS and an increase in career decision making certainty, or whether trying to decrease career indecision directly would affect FOS or self-esteem. Studies addressing causal relationships are desperately needed to inform practice for school counselors. The present investigators are currently looking at causal factors.

If Condry and Dyer (1976) are correct that FOS is a

situational variable, the present results suggest important questions about the situational variables existent in rural Appalachia that could cause males to have a higher FOS than females, when the opposite appears true in more urban settings. Do females in rural Appalachia have lower FOS than males because they have little expectation or desire for a career? Also, why do rural youth have a greater FOS in general than urban youth? Possibilities which need to be explored include economic diversity of the community, unemployment rates, student achievement orientation and attainment, higher education and vocational training programs, and rate of dependence on public assistance.

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Table 1.

Means and standard deviation of Fear of Success by Sex			
Sex	n	$\bar{x}$	SD
Male	129	115.62	17.96
Female	133	110.75	18.39

Table 2.

Means and standard deviations of Certainty and Indecision scores by grade.

Grade	Certainty		Indecision	
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
9th	5.81	1.54	34.36	8.55
12th	5.84	1.79	32.63	9.68

Note: **7th grade not included.**

Table 3.

Relationships Between Fear of Success, Self-Esteem, and Career Decision Making

Fear of success	x	Self-esteem	r=-.1430 **
Fear of success	x	Career indecision	r= .1680 *
Self-esteem	x	Career certainty	r= .1544 *
Self-esteem	x	Career indecision	r=-.2300 *

Note: * p<.01, ** p<.05

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